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HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

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GEORGE STEELE
Architect and Builder of the Nineteenth Century
by
F. Charles Vaughn, Jr.

George Gilliam Steele was an architect and builder of uncommon talent, in Huntsville, Alabama, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Very little is known of Steele's early life, but through his buildings, he left records of the achievements of his adult years. Steele's early works were in the prevailing Federal style and are very similar to the designs of many other architects of the period. However, he was affected by the Classical Revival movement in architecture, in which Greek and Roman forms were used in new ways in American buildings. He began to experiment with the new style, at first making extensive use of builders' pattern books. But after he became comfortable with Classical details, his designs became more and more original and he relied less extensively on books. Steele was obviously the leading architect and builder in the Huntsville area, for he was selected to design and build such important public buildings as the second Madison County Courthouse and the State Bank of Alabama as well as many of the city's finest residences. Steele's contributions to the architecture of the Huntsville area are indeed immense.

According to family papers, George Gilliam Steele was born in Bedford County, Virginia, in 1798, the son of George Steele and Sally Gilliam Steele.¹ Legend has it that the family into which he was born was quite prestigious; his father was supposed to have served under General Washington during the Revolutionary War.² George was the family's fourth child, and his mother died either during his birth or soon after.³ His father married Polly Baker of Bedford County and moved his family to Botetourt County, Virginia, where another child was born in 1802. Very little is actually known of Steele's childhood in Virginia. Family papers indicate that young George served as a private in the Tennessee militia during the War of 1812.⁴ Even less can be determined with certainty about the young man's education. Neither the University of Virginia, Washington and Lee University, nor Hampden-Sydney College have any record of a student named George Steele. Since these are the only three colleges in Virginia which were

established during this period, one must assume that Steele did not receive his architectural training in the formal fashion. More likely he served as an apprentice to a builder in Virginia and there learned the rudiments of architecture.⁵

Steele apparently moved to Huntsville in 1818; a very plausible story indicates that he came in the company of William Fleming, another prominent Huntsvillian, also from Botetourt County, Virginia.⁶ The United States Census figures tend to support the story (or at least to confirm that Steele left Virginia prior to 1820). The census shows the number of members of each household who were white males, white females, and slaves. The figures are further broken down according to age. In 1810, the Steele household in Virginia was listed as having one male member in the ten-sixteen age bracket (George Steele would have been twelve at the time). In 1820, however, there were no sixteen to twenty-five-year-old white males in residence (Steele would have been twenty-two in 1820).⁷ This would indicate that he had left home prior to the date of the latter census.

The earliest reference placing George Steele in the Huntsville area is in a deed dated 1822. In describing the boundaries of a parcel of land bought by the trustees of Greene Academy, mention is made of "George Steele's brick yard."⁸ Thus, Steele must have arrived in the area sometime prior to 1822 in order to make preparations and begin producing bricks. Another early reference is Steele's marriage license, dated December 23, 1823.⁹ He was married in Huntsville to Eliza Ann Weaver of Campbell County, Virginia.¹⁰ Soon after that date, Steele's name appears on the deed books of Madison County quite frequently. He bought land from Leroy Pope in 1824, and from that time until his death in 1855, he was involved in a number of land transactions in the Huntsville area.¹¹

Steele grew quite wealthy from his building endeavors and from land speculation. His prosperity is indicated by the houses he built for himself and by the fact that all seven of his children were educated (the three girls at proper finishing schools and the four boys at the University of Virginia and the University of Alabama).¹² In fact, at least one of his sons held a professional degree.¹³ Moreover, Steele's wealth is indicated by the size of the estate which he left to his family. At the time of his death, Steele owned three pieces of property on the public

square, lots on Randolph, Clinton, and California Streets totalling at least ten acres, and property in the "country" near Maple Hill Cemetery totalling thirty acres.¹⁴ According to a schedule of property attached to his will, he owned seventy-four slaves valued at over seventy thousand dollars.¹⁵ Among these slaves were skilled stonecutters, bricklayers, plasterers, and carpenters whom he used in his building projects. Some of these slaves carried a value of as much as two thousand dollars each. In addition, Steele left to his family his own impressive home, Oaks Place, and 320 acres surrounding it.

In order to understand and appreciate the architecture of George Steele, one must place his works in historical perspective. At the time that Steele began to design and construct buildings in Huntsville, the Federal style was far and away the prevailing style throughout the United States. Federal architecture is characterized by multi-storey buildings of square or rectangular ground plan with simple, flat facades. Decoration is usually minimal, and if it appears, is usually at the cornice. Customarily, a symmetrical arrangement of five bays across the front of the structure is present. The usual room arrangement consists of two rooms to either side of a central hall. Smaller Federal houses were designed with three bays across the front and usually consisted of two rooms front to back with a stair hall to one side. However, the windows and doors were arranged so that the symmetry of the exterior was still preserved.

Architects in the cultural centers of the United States were beginning to rebel against the Federal style even as George Steele was designing his first buildings based on this model. One of the reasons for the shift in taste was undoubtedly that some of the older, more established areas of the country were simply ready for a change. In addition, however, the War of 1812 had intensified American distaste for Great Britain, so Americans did not want to continue to draw upon an architecture rooted in the British tradition.¹⁶ They chose as a replacement the impressive buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. Most felt that the ideals of the classical civilizations were fitting for the young American nation, and the buildings themselves were sufficiently impressive to appeal to Americans engrossed in the idea of their greatness and their potential in the world. However, as a Classical Revival architect in Baltimore wrote, "It is as much out of the rule of rationality to reinvigorate architecture by forcing it into an antique

mold as to expect that...we can bring back simplicity and innocence by putting on the garments of youth."¹⁷ This opinion was widely held, and so American architects looked to the classics mainly for inspiration concerning detail—the proportion of a column or design of an order. They sought not to copy but to create within the ancient framework.¹⁸ Greek and Roman culture had “become the symbol of all that was free, refined, thoughtful and—especially—beautiful in human life.”¹⁹ The beauty was derived as much from the ancient ideals that the buildings stood for as from the buildings themselves.

With the rise of the Classical Revival style came the increased production of architectural handbooks, builder's companions, and other similar books which served to spread building styles from the cities outward into all areas of the young nation. Though this type of book had been published much earlier, its popularity grew enormously with the spread of the Classical Revival movement. The increased attention to detail necessary in the new style, coupled with the ever-widening interest in architecture, explain the wide sales. Architects of the first water, such as Asher Benjamin, Owen Biddle, and John Haviland, sold countless copies of their books to architects and builders throughout the country. The books contained descriptions of correct building techniques useful in constructing houses from foundation to roof. In addition, and perhaps more important, they contained excellent engravings illustrating correct classical orders and details, and adaptations of classical detail to such modern needs as fireplaces and interior stairways. They also gave rules of proportion for columns and entablatures as well as for door and window trim. Asher Benjamin was probably the most successful of these handbook authors, producing seven different handbooks between 1797 and 1843. Several of his books even sold so many copies that they went through several editions.

Though the widespread use of handbooks did result to some extent in a standardization of architecture, standardization was not necessarily an unfortunate occurrence. The standards set were high, and thus, high architectural quality was assured throughout the United States.²⁰ In fact, standardization was to some degree prevented in the South because the Classical Revival was so late in appearing.²¹ Those who moved into the newly opening areas generally preferred the Federal style which they had left behind in the older areas of the

East.²² Ann Royal's account of Huntsville in 1818 presents the town as a bustling place of "great splendor."²³ Nonetheless, one may be assured that the majority of local homes were in the older, more conservative Federal style. Thus, when George Steele arrived in Huntsville in 1818, he found a public most receptive to the Federal style, and his earliest works reflected those preferences.

The Steele-Gaines House, 519 Randolph Street, which George Steele built in 1824 as a home for his family, is unmistakably Federal in character.²⁴ The flat, three-bay facade with entrance door to one side is characteristic of the style. The Classical Revival details which the house possesses were additions of the 1840's. The Feeney-Barber House, 414 Randolph Street, constructed sometime between 1825 and 1832, is also a George Steele house of similar Federal design.²⁵ The floor plan at the time of construction included but a single room and side hall in each storey. This plan is also Federal, being one half of the typical small Federal house which was usually two rooms deep front to back.

Still a third house which Steele built in the Federal style is the Cabaniss House, 603 Randolph Street, constructed around 1832.²⁶ Once again, each floor is made up of two rooms front to back with a hall to one side. The facade has three bays with the door located to the side. However, even at this early date, Steele may have added two of Asher Benjamin's books to his library, for the plan of the second floor of the Cabaniss House is remarkably similar to one of the plates in Benjamin's *New Sytems of Architecture*.²⁷ The Cabaniss House contains not only the usual two rooms and hall, but also another small room to be used as a study or bedroom created by walling off the front part of the hall. Furthermore, the stairway's newel post is identical to a newel post illustrated in Benjamin's *Practical House Carpenter*.²⁸ In addition, the fireplace mantels in the two parlors show the influence of the Classical Revival. Both feature pilasters as a part of their design.²⁹ Those of the front or formal parlor are delicately fluted while those of the informal parlor in the rear are plain.

Because of widespread circulation of the builder's handbooks, it seems entirely possible that George Steele could have been influenced by the Classical Revival at this early date. Moreover, family papers mention that Steele attended lectures in New York City on the subject

of architecture on more than one occasion and that he accumulated "numerous volumes...relating to the classic architecture of Greece and Rome."³⁰

However, his most profound experience with the Classical style was yet to come. In a letter to Doctor Thomas Fearn of Huntsville from Washington D.C. in 1835, Steele relates that experience:

I have been here three days and after seeing the University [of Virginia] and Monticello at Charlottesville, as I passed on, I had thout [sic] that I would be prepared to enter this city with less excitement of feelings, but the reverse has been the fact, and to describe to you what I felt when I first arrived where the Capital and the President's House, with all their sublimity, broke upon my view, would be impossible. I have since however visited them several times, and whatever admiration might have been at the first sight of them, it was far short of what it really was on my entering these glorious monuments of our national pride. For I was ready to fall down and worship the genius that composed them. This no doubt you will smile at, be it so.³¹

From this period onward, Steele designed increasingly in the Classical Revival style, finding it necessary at the same time to make more frequent use of builder's pattern books.

The building which he designed for the State Bank of Alabama, West Side Court House Square, in 1835 was a true temple-form classical building.³² Its east front matches, with one minor exception, the structure which Benjamin Latrobe designed for the Bank of Pennsylvania—Steele decided not to top the edifice with the low dome and lantern which Latrobe used. Steele probably found the design for the building in Owen Biddle's *Young Carpenter's Assistant*, where its main front was illustrated in plate twenty-three.³³ The hexastyle porticoes of Ionic columns and the unornamented entablatures are the same. The floor plan is also curiously similar to the plan of another temple-form bank building, the first Bank of the United States. The plan for this structure appears in another popular handbook, John Haviland's *Builder's Assistant*.³⁴ In both plans, the main entrance opens into a vestibule flanked by private offices with a large public space used for bank transactions beyond. Beyond that, in each case, are stairways and rooms for the use of bank employees. The similarity in floor plan may be coincidental, but the exact match of the two

building fronts definitely indicates the use of builder's pattern books in this design.

Steele was also placed in charge of the actual construction of the bank building. Entries in an old bank record book for the period show payments to Steele for his work from 1837 to 1840. The oldest entry is a payment for vault doors dated July 8, 1837, and receipted by Steele. Payments continued until September 14, 1840, at which time a sum slightly in excess of \$1000 was paid "in full of all demands for building the Bank house."³⁵ In addition, various entries in this book name the workmen involved in the installation of the copper roof, the carpentry, painting, ironwork, and of course the stone and brickwork. The total cost of the building was just over \$60,000, of which approximately \$34,000 went to Steele in return for preparation of plans, materials furnished, and supervision.

The building was quite an undertaking for the architect, and the results are a tribute to his talent. The foundation and facing stone were quarried nearby, but the capitals and shafts of the columns were shipped by barge from Baltimore, Maryland, to Triana and carried by oxcart to Huntsville.³⁶ The bank vault itself was also constructed of limestone slabs, these nearly six feet thick. The steel vault door had no combination lock, but instead was operated by clocks which activated the locking bolts, opening and closing the bolts at the appointed times. The heavy timbers used in the construction of the building were made of poplar, and red cedar was used in the exterior woodwork because of its resistance to decay.

In another public building, the Second Madison County Courthouse, Steele also used the temple-form plan. The floor plan is strikingly similar to the plan of a church in Asher Benjamin's *Practice of Architecture*.³⁷ The colonade at the entrance of each building is backed by another pair of columns behind which is located the main entrance doorway. A stairway is located in either corner of the building, and the courtroom in the Steele building corresponds to the sanctuary of the church. A colonade in the interior set several feet away from the side walls supports the ceiling in each building. The same Doric columns which Steele used in the exterior appear in plate three of Benjamin's *Elements of Architecture* and in plate four of his *Practical House Carpenter*.³⁸ The exact hexastyle portico of the building ap-

pears in plate twenty-one of Benjamin's *Builder's Guide*.³⁹ The entablatures, with their decorated frieze and molded cornice, match perfectly. The same use of pilasters between windows along the long sides of the building is present in plate fifty-four of the *Practical House Carpenter*, as is the continuation of the carved frieze along the top of the walls.⁴⁰ In the interior, the row of Ionic columns which supports the ceiling of the courtroom are exactly the same as those in plate ten of Benjamin's *Elements of Architecture*, even to the design of the bases and the carvings on the capital volutes.⁴¹ The moldings of the entablatures match perfectly the designs of the plates, even to the lack of decoration of the frieze. Most assuredly Steele used builder's pattern books to prepare the plans for the courthouse.

In his own home, Oaks Place, 808 Maysville Road, which he built in 1840, Steele developed a unique residential design.⁴² He abandoned the old southern tradition of the central hall bordered by two rooms on either side. Instead, to the right of the hall, he placed a large ballroom with fourteen-foot ceilings. In addition, he varied the floor level of the main storey. The smaller rooms to the left of the hall were located several steps above the ballroom in order that they might have correct ceiling height for their reduced size. The dining room was located in the basement below these smaller rooms and so was given a higher ceiling because of the raised floor. The room was ingeniously divided by large folding doors so that it could be used in part for a small family dinner or enlarged for a banquet. The sleeping quarters for guests were divided dormitory style so that men and women could not reach each others' rooms except through the main hallway. This was important during times when large house parties were going on, for it prevented scandalous gossip about the possibility of rendezvous between the guests.

Unfortunately, a great deal of the interior trim of Oaks Place has been replaced over the years; the stairway has been redesigned; and in its new use as part of a church, much of the interior detail which could be compared to handbooks of the Classical Revival style has been destroyed. However, the exterior is still largely intact. The front portico, which consists of four columns, two square ones on the outside corners and two Doric ones between, matches very closely the portico illustrated in plate thirty of Benjamin's *Practical House Carpenter*, and the entablature and Doric columns are exactly the same as plate

seven of the *Elements of Architecture*, also by Benjamin.⁴³ Thus, one can see that George Steele had become more proficient in his craft by the time he designed Oaks Place. He felt comfortable enough to experiment with unconventional room arrangements and floor levels. Furthermore, he was designing only to please himself and his family, not for a client. Therefore, he was able to attempt the out-of-the-ordinary without fear of the plan's rejection.

The remodeling of the Fearn home, 517 Franklin Street, which Steele undertook in 1847 also shows the influence of the Classical Revival style.⁴⁴ Though the original residence was Federal, and though the addition manages to retain the Federal flavor, overtones of the Classical Revival are skillfully blended with the original into an integrated whole. The addition consisted of the front porch and two parlors with two bedrooms above. Pilasters were added to the residence to divide the space between the windows, and interior and exterior trim were done in the classical manner. The simple Doric order of the front porch matches exactly the order illustrated in plates three, seven, eight, and nine of Benjamin's *Elements of Architecture* and in plate four of his *Practical House Carpenter*.⁴⁵ The parlor fireplace matches exactly a plate in Biddle's *Young Carpenter's Assistant*, except for minor variations in the detail of carved decorations.⁴⁶ These variations can be understood by realizing the skill necessary to complete the mantel as Biddle illustrated it. It is highly unlikely that a woodcarver of the talent necessary to produce the mantel illustrated could be found in Huntsville, or indeed anywhere outside of the larger, older cities of the coast.

The stairs of the rear porch were probably the original interior stairs of the house. When later remodelings involved the construction of a Victorian stairway, the original stairs were removed to the porch. The stair brackets found on the exterior stairs are very similar to brackets found in Haviland's *Builder's Assistant*.⁴⁷

An even more effective and imaginative blending of the Federal and Classical Revival styles was accomplished in the Pope-Spragins House, 403 Echols Avenue, which Steele remodeled in 1848.⁴⁸ The columns which he added are Doric of the type illustrated by Benjamin in plate five of his *Practical House Carpenter*.⁴⁹ The transom which he installed above the front door is a squared version of the semicircular

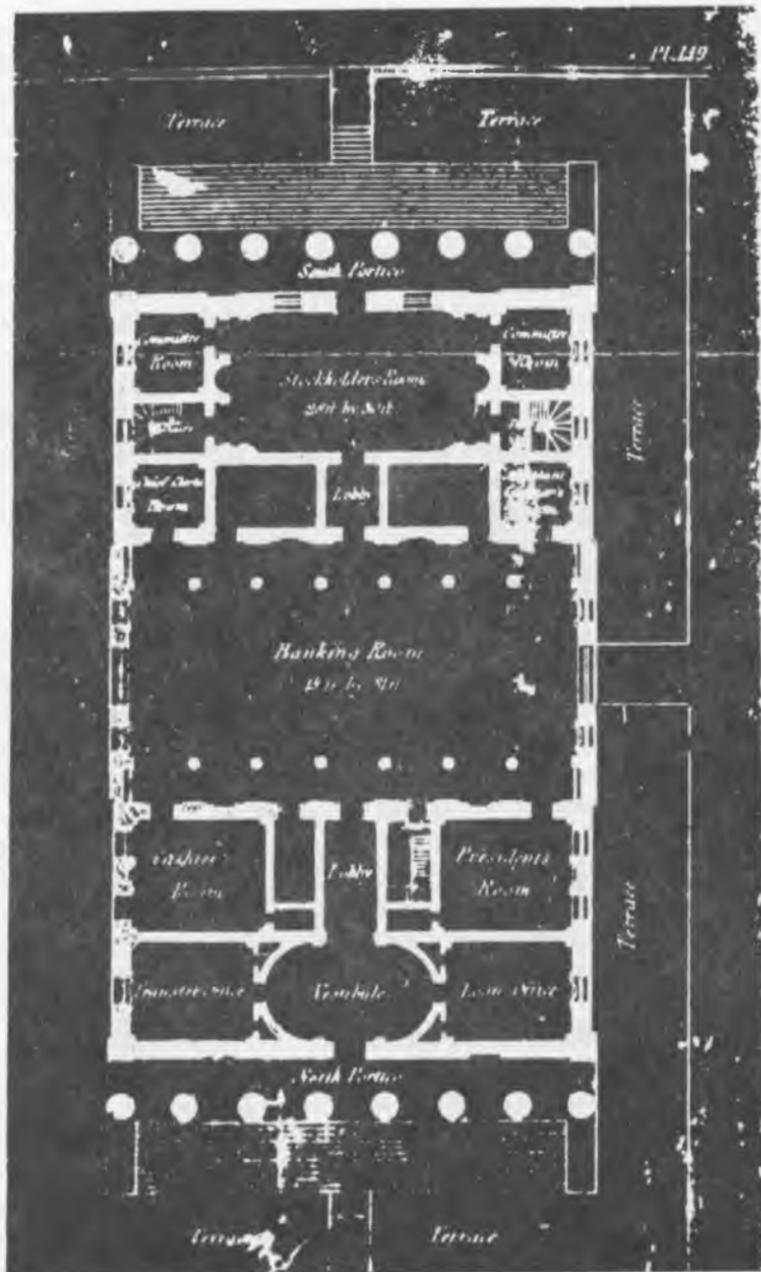
glass illustrated in plate sixteen of Benjamin's *New Systems of Architecture*.⁵⁰ However, Steele added trim around the main entrance and on the entablature which was not Classical Revival, but Federal, and was obviously intended to make the two styles more compatible. He was extremely successful in the combination, creating a house of dignity and grace.

An examination of the works of George Steele indicates his growth as an architect. Though he began his career designing and executing buildings in the Federal style, he found the Classical Revival style to be more to his liking. He relied heavily on pattern books when he began to create in the new style, creating at first buildings which drew greatly upon the works of others. However, he became more imaginative with practice and further study and succeeded admirably at his craft in the design of his own home, Oaks Place, and in the remodeling of the Fearn home and the Pope-Spragins home.

In order to assess the contributions made by George Steele to the architecture of the Huntsville area, one might look at the construction of the period following his death to see the extent of his influence over the design of those buildings. However, this method has its shortcomings because of the events of the years following Steele's death. With the coming of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the fortunes based upon the slave economy of the South were lost. Few Southerners had the means to build homes, so the amount of construction was naturally somewhat limited. Moreover, the buildings which were built were usually frame dwellings constructed with such small budgets that they could not fairly be compared with the houses of George Steele. In addition, the houses built during Reconstruction which remain today have been altered to a degree that makes comparison difficult.

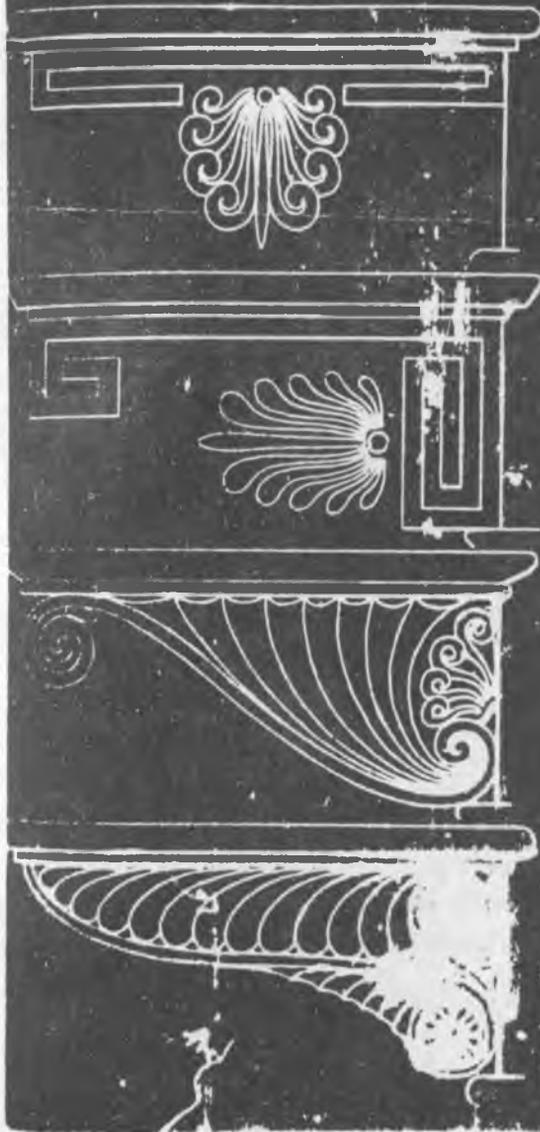
Instead, a fairer way to evaluate Steele might be to look at his works from a modern viewpoint. Over one hundred years after they were built, his buildings, with few exceptions, stand as strong as they did when they were new. Steele built his buildings to last. The design of his buildings is still considered excellent; in fact, they are as desirable today as they were when they were first constructed. In his buildings, Steele left a record of the development of architectural trends as a small Southern frontier town in the early nineteenth century became a thriving cultural center by midcentury. The works of

George Steele are excellent, not only from a historical perspective, but also because of their design; they are powerful in their simplicity and elegant because of their correct proportion.



Haviland, plate 149

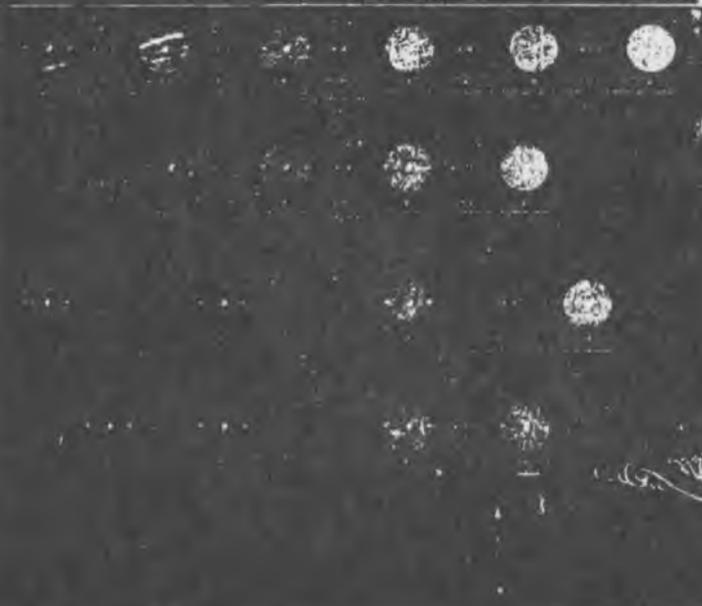
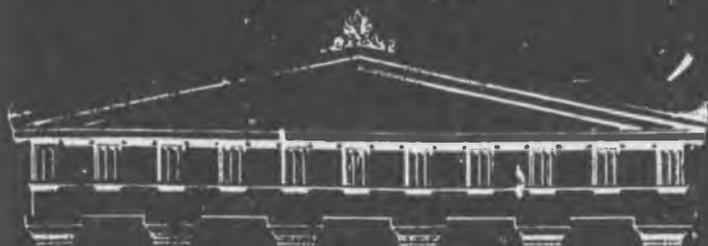
BRACKETS FOR STAIRS.



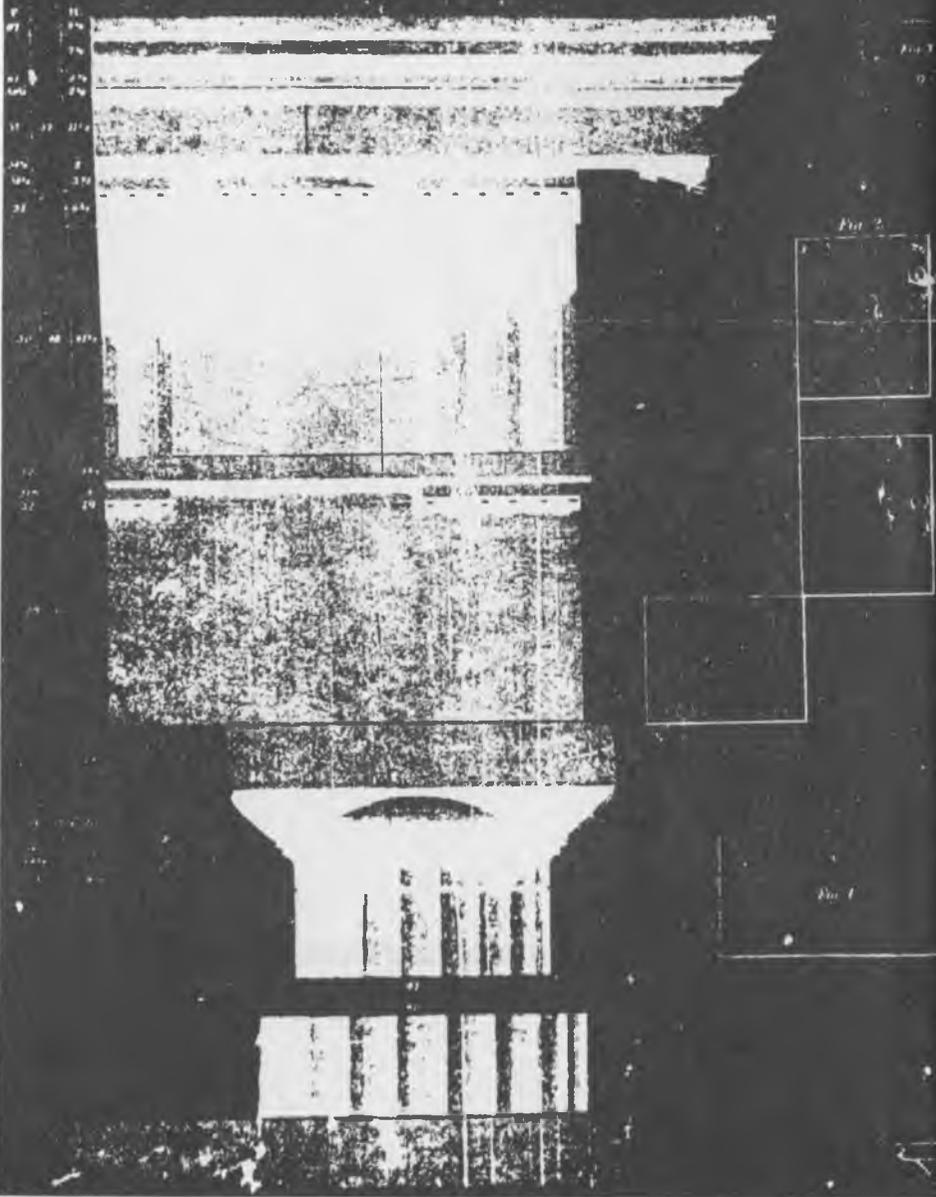
Haviland, plate 117



Young Carpenter's Assistant, plate 42



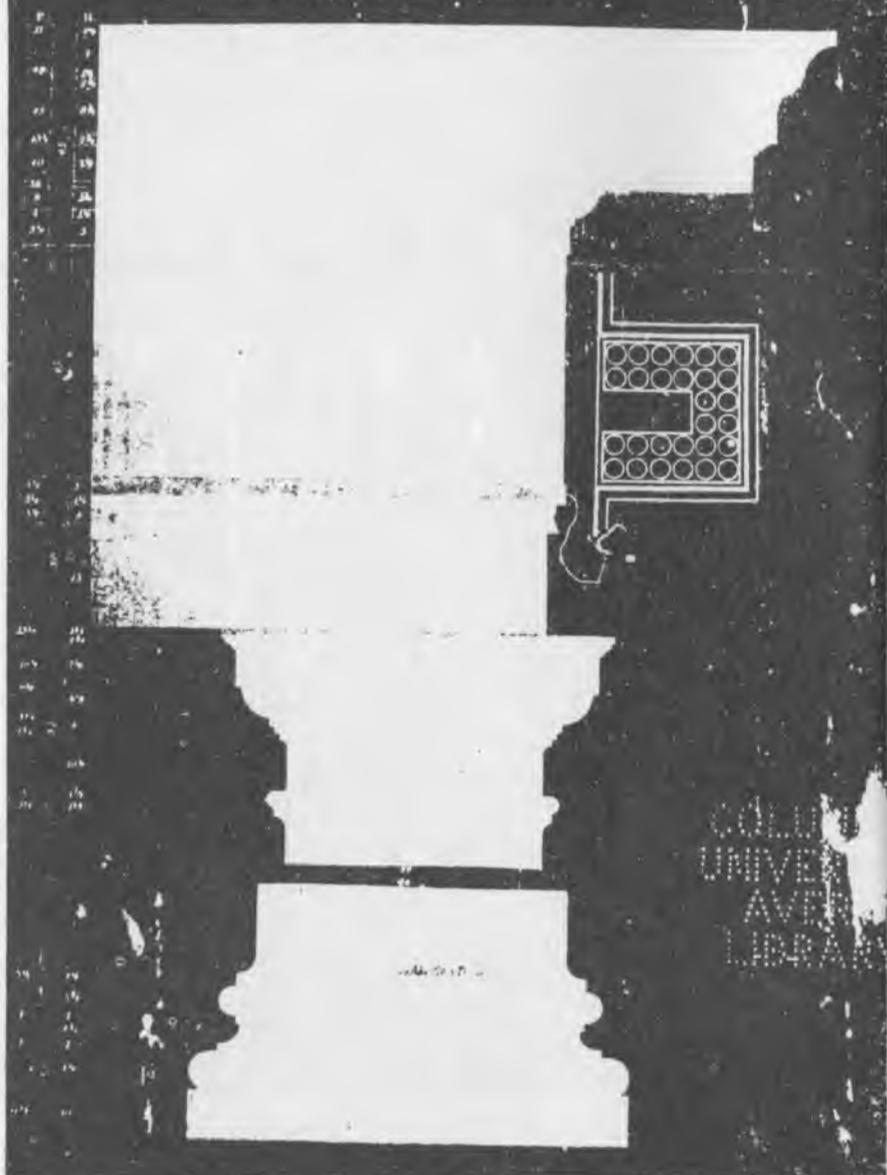
Builder's Guide, plate 21



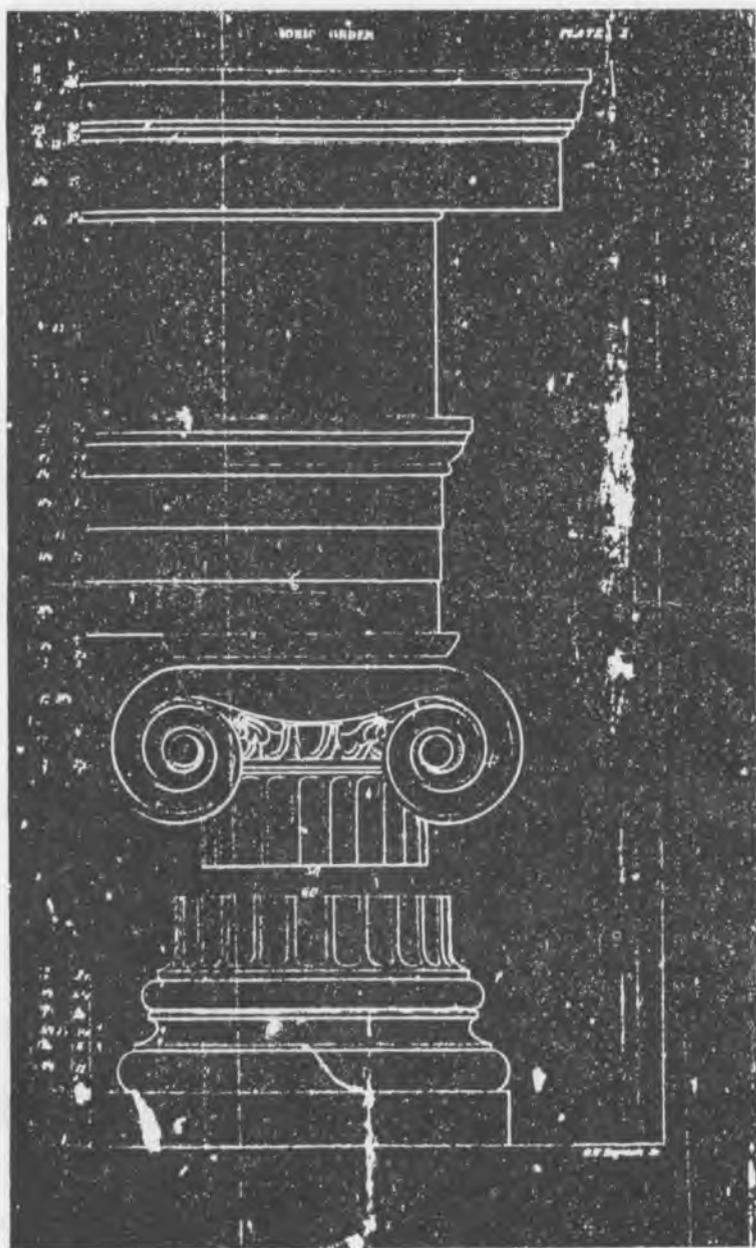
Practical House Carpenter, plate 4



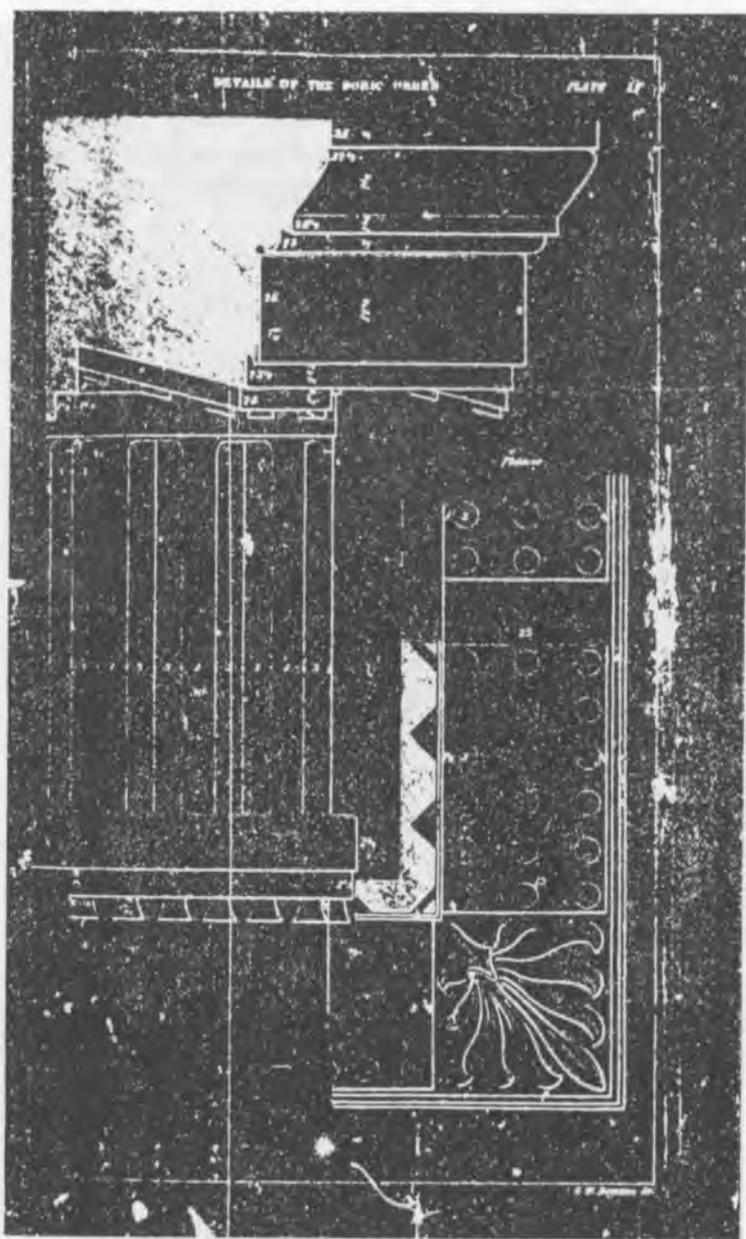
Practical House Carpenter, plate 30



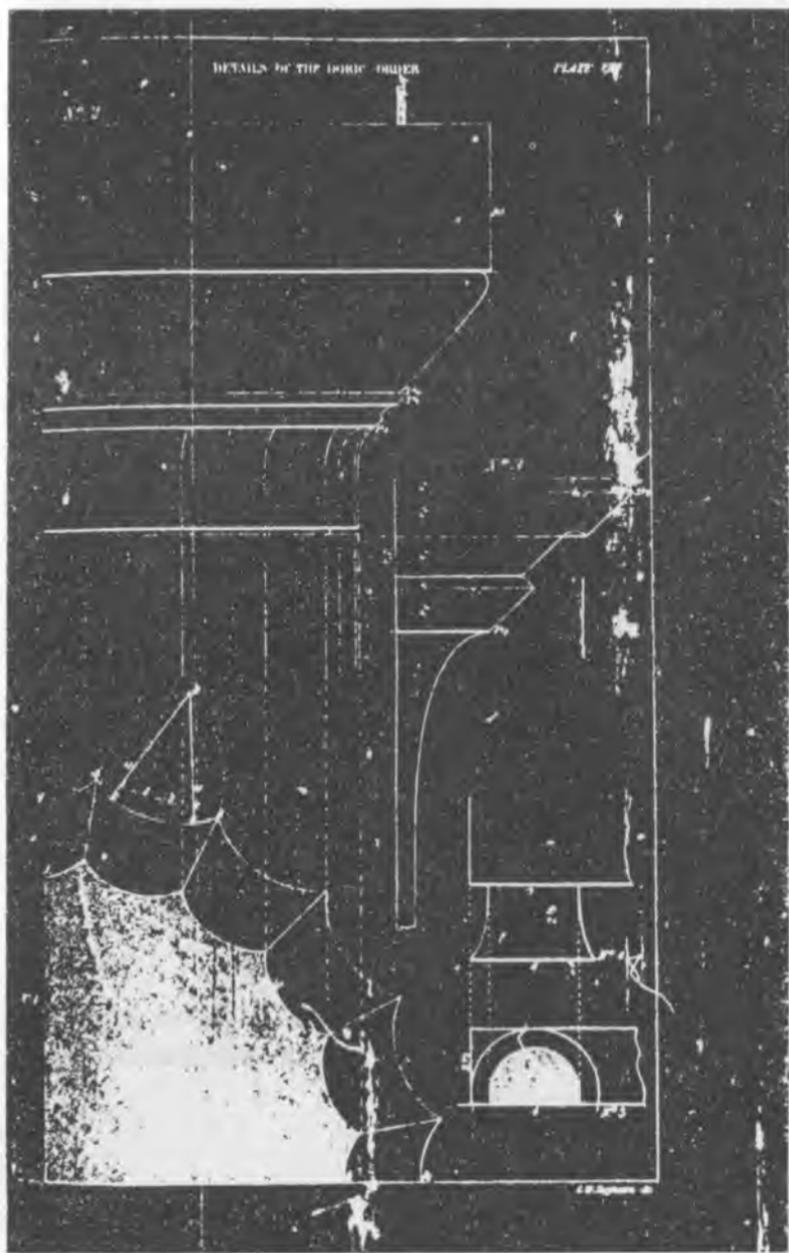
Practical House Carpenter, plate 5



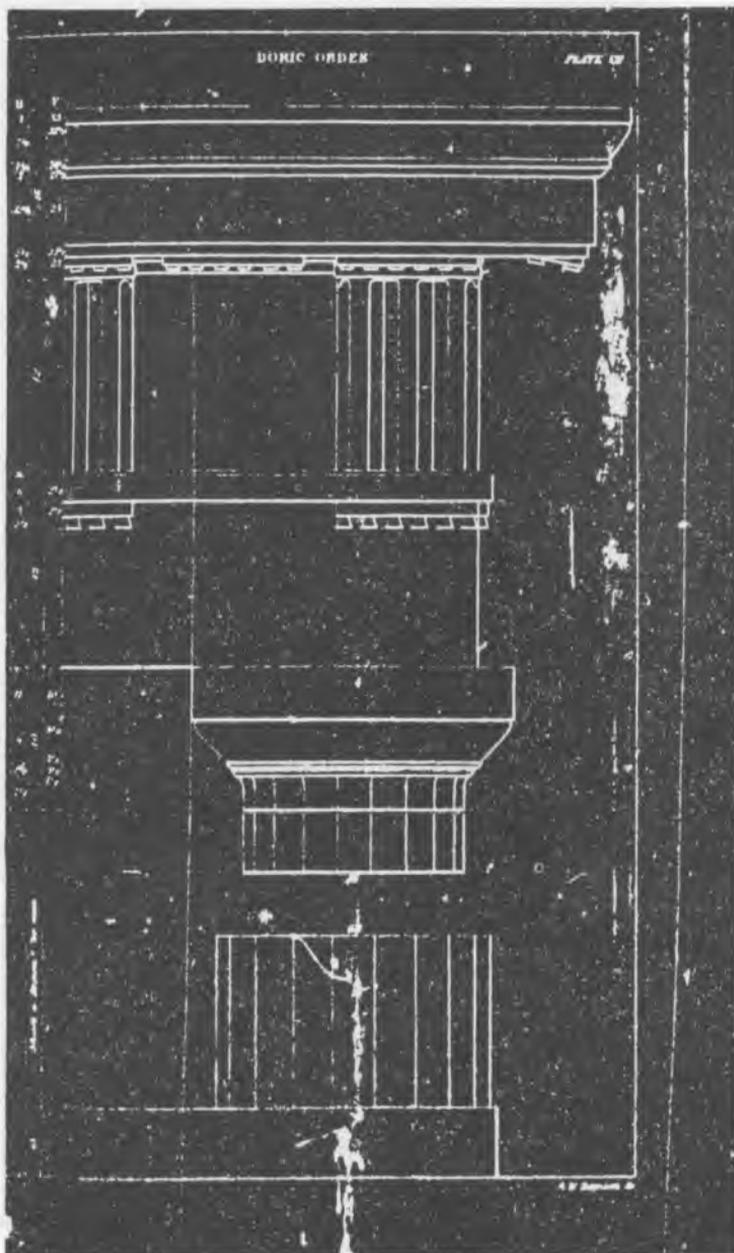
Elements of Architecture, plate 10



Elements of Architecture, plate 9



Elements of Architecture, plate 8



Elements of Architecture, plate 7

GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURAL TERMS

architrave, the lowermost part of the entablature located immediately above the columns of a colonnade.

base, the lowermost part of a column.

capital, the uppermost part of a column directly below the architrave.

colonnade, a series of columns set at regular intervals supported by a roof.

cornice, the uppermost part of the entablature which supports the edge of the roof.

entablature, the part of a classical building between the top of the columns and the roof.

frieze, the center part of the entablature which may be decorated with carvings.

hexastyle, consisting of six columns.

pilaster, flat rectangular architectural device attached to a wall. It has a base, shaft, and capital and looks like a flattened column.

portico, a porch with a roof supported by a row of columns.

shaft, the cylindrical part of the column located between the capital and base.

temple-form building, a building resembling the ancient classical temples with colonnades along either or both short walls or completely surrounding the structure.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 2, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

²*Ibid.*, Folder 3.

³*Ibid.*, Folder 2.

⁴*Ibid.*, Folder 3.

⁵Interview with Frances C. Roberts, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, Alabama, May 1978.

⁶*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 2.

⁷U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of the United States, 1810: Population*, Botetourt County, VA.; and U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of the United States, 1820: Population*, Botetourt County, VA.

⁸Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, Probate Court Records, *John Brahan et al. to deed Greene Academy*, Deed Book I-J, p. 115.

⁹Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, Probate Court Records, *Marriage License of George Steele and Eliza Ann Weaver*, Marriage Licenses, Vol. 3, p. 268.

¹⁰*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 2.

¹¹Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, Probate Court Records, *Leroy Pope and Wife to deed George Steele*, Deed Book I-J, p. 116.

¹²Martha Simms, "George Steele—the man," *Art Gallery Magazine* 21 (April-May 1978): 38.

¹³George Gilliam Steele, Jr. was a doctor. *Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 27.

¹⁴*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), p. 4.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 97.

²⁰Lewis Mumford, *The South in Architecture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967), p. 38.

²¹Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, p. 192.

²²Simms, "George Steele," p. 38.

²³Frances C. Roberts, "The Public Square in Alabama History," *Dedication Booklet for Madison Cty. Courthouse* (Huntsville, Ala.: Madison Cty. Bd. of Commissioners, 1967), p. 8.

²⁴*Glimpses into Antebellum Homes* (Huntsville, Alabama: American Association of University Women, Huntsville Branch, 1976), p. 32.

²⁵Ibid. p. 31.; Simms "George Steele," p. 38.

²⁶*Glimpses*, p. 33.

²⁷Asher Benjamin, *New Systems of Architecture* (Boston: Etheridge and Bliss, 1806), plate 34.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations, Branch of Plans and Design; *Plans of the Cabaniss House* (Survey ALA 431), sheet 2.

²⁸Asher Benjamin, *The Practical House Carpenter* (Boston: R.P. & C. Williams & Annin & Smith, 1830), plate 57.; and *Cabanniss Plan*, sheet 8.

²⁹*Cabanniss Plan*. sheets 10-11.

³⁰*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 2.

³¹Ibid., Folder 7.

³²*Glimpses*, p. 46.

³³Owen Biddle, *Young Carpenter's Assistant* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Johnson, 1805), plate 42.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations, Branch of Plans and Design, *Plans of First National Bank of Huntsville* (Survey 16-405), sheet 3.

³⁴John Haviland, *The Builder's Assistant* (Philadelphia: John Bioren, 1818), plate 149.; and *Bank Plan*, sheet 1.

³⁵William H. Brantley, *Banking in Alabama 1816-1860*, 2 vols. (Birmingham, Ala.; By the author, 1961), 1:377.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 378.

³⁷Asher Benjamin, *Practice of Architecture* (Boston: the author and Carter, Hendie and Co., 1830), plate 31.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings and Reservations, Branch of Plans and Design, *Plans of the Madison County Courthouse 1835-40 to 1914* (Survey ALA 437), sheet 3.

³⁸Asher Benjamin, *Elements of Architecture* (Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey, 1843), plate 3.; and *Courthouse plan*, sheet 4.

³⁹Asher Benjamin, *The Builder's Guide* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin; Philadelphia Henry Perkins, 1839), Plate 21.; and *Courthouse plan*, sheet 4.

⁴⁰Benjamin, *Practical House Carpenter*. Plate 54.; and *Courthouse plan*, sheet 4.

⁴¹Benjamin, *Elements*, plate 10.; and *Courthouse plan*, sheet 6.

⁴²*Crutchfield-Fearn-Steele Family Papers*, Folder 2.

⁴³Benjamin, *Practical House Carpenter*, plate 30.; and Benjamin, *Elements*, plate 7.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings, And Reservations, Branch of Plans and Designs, *Plans of Steele-Fowler Residence* (Survey 16-402), sheet 2.

⁴⁴*Glimpses*, p. 19.

⁴⁵Benjamin, *Elements*, plates 3, 7, 8, 9.; and Benjamin, *Practical House Carpenter*, plate 4.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservations, Branch of Plans and Design, *Plans of Doctor Fearn-Garth Home* (Survey ALA 414), sheet 8.

⁴⁶Biddle, *Young Carpenter's Assistant*, plate 22.; And *Fearn-Garth Plan*, sheet 6.

⁴⁷Haviland, *Builder's Assistant*, plate 117.; and *Fearn-Garth Plan*, sheet 7.

⁴⁸*Glimpses*, p. 5.

⁴⁹Benjamin, *Practical House Carpenter*, plate 5.; and U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings, and Reservation, Branch of Plans and Design, *Plan of Pope-Spragins Residence* (Survey 16-406) sheet 2.

⁵⁰Benjamin, *New Systems*, Plate 16.; and *Pope-Spragins Plan*, Sheet 3.

⁵¹Edward Chambers Betts, *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama 1804 to 1870* (Montgomery, Alabama: Brown Printing Co., 1916), p. 46.

⁵²Judge Thomas Jones Taylor, *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama 1732-1840* (University, Alabama: Confederate Publishing Co., 1976), p. 74.

⁵³Betts, p. 46.

⁵⁴Taylor, p. 99.

⁵⁵Taylor, p. 105; and Betts, p. 79.

⁵⁶Brantley, 2:9-10.

⁵⁷Betts, p. 49.

THE CASE AGAINST HUNTER PEELE

Edited by Bill Stubno

The following case, *United States vs. Hunter Peele*, was heard in the District Court of the United States for the Northern District of Alabama between 1825 and 1827. Peele, who needed wooden cedar pipes to construct Huntsville's first water system, was charged with taking timber from public land without proper authorization. [Editor's Note: for the history of the water works see Frank Wilson, "History of Huntsville Water Works," *The Huntsville Historical Review*, v. 3, n. 3, July, 1973.] He was eventually found not guilty by "a jury of good and lawful men," among them George Steele, the noted Huntsville architect.

United States Be it remembered that heretofore, to
vs. wit, on the fifth day of January in the
Hunter Peele year of our Lord one thousand eight
 hundred and twenty four [clerk meant to
write twenty-five] , was issued by the clerk of the Northern
District Court at Huntsville, in the State of Alabama, a writ of
capias ad respondendum in the name of the United States of
America plaintiff against Hunter Peele defendant; which said
writ is in these words viz.: The President of the United States.
To the Marshall of the Northern District of Alabama, Greeting:
we command you to take Hunter Peele who is a citizen resident
of said District, if to be found therein, and him safely keep so
that you have his body before the Honorable the Judge of the
District Court of the United States, for said District, to be held
at Huntsville on the second Monday in January 1825 to answer
the United States of America of a plea of trespass with force and
arms, quare clausum fregit to the damage of the United States
of America of two thousand dollars and have then there this
writ. Witness the Hon. Charles Tait Judge of the said Court, the
5th day of January in the year of our Lord, one
SEAL thousand eight hundred and twenty four [clerk

meant to write twenty-five] and of the Independence of the United States of America the 49th year. Issued 5th day of January 1825.

C.R. Clifton Clerk of the said Court sealed with my private seal there being no seal of office— (Endorsed) This is an action of trespass quare clausum fregit, brought by the United States of America to recover damages of the defendant for breaking and entering on the lands of the United States of America in said District and cutting down and carrying away ten thousand red cedar trees and ten thousand white cedar trees and ten thousand red oaks and other trees in the years 1823 and 1824. Bail required. F. Jones, Attorney for the United States of America in the Northern District of Alabama.

(Marshall Receipt and Return) Recd. Jan'y 5. 1825 and executed same day

F.W. Armstrong M.A.O.

(And at the same term came the plaintiff by attorney and filed a declaration in said cause in the words and figures following viz. :) United States of America Northern District of the State of Alabama, District Court of the United States of America Northern District of Alabama. January Term 1825— The United States of America by their attorney Frank Jones complain of Hunter Peele in custody of the Marshall & c. of a plea of trespass with force and arms, quare clausum fregit & c. For that the said Hunter Peele heretofore to wit on the ___ day of ___ 1823 and on divers other days and times between that day and the day of the commencement of this suit with force and arms to wit at -in the County of Madison in the said Northern District of Alabama felled, cut down, carried away and destroyed the trees and pollards to wit ten thousand red cedar trees, ten thousand white cedar trees, and ten thousand red oaks and other trees of the said United States of America of great value to wit of the value of ten thousand dollars then growing and being in and

upon certain lands there situate and took and carried away the same and converted and dispend thereof to his own use— To the damage of the said United States of America ten thousand dollars and therefore they bring their suit & c.

Frank Jones Attorney for the said
United States in the Northern District of Alabama

(And at the same term came the defendant by attorneys, and filed his plea in said cause in the words and figures following viz.) And the defendant by his attorney came and defends the wrong and injury when & c. and for plea says the plaintiff his action against him ought not to have and maintain because he says he is not guilty of the trespass in manner and form as the said plaintiff hath alledged against him, and of this he puts himself upon the country McKinley and Hopkins and Campbell for Deft.- (And afterwards to wit on the third day of October being a of the term of the said court begun and held for said Northern District of Alabama at Huntsville in said District on the first Monday in October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty six this entry was made in said cause to wit. The plaintiffs in this cause not being represented in this court. It is ordered, that it be continued until the next term (and now afterwards to wit on the second day of October being a day of the term of the said court, begun and held for said Northern District of Alabama, at Huntsville in said District on the first Monday in October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty seven, came as well Harry I. Thornton District Attorney, who prosecutes in this behalf, as the said defendant by his attorney and thereupon to try said issue came also a jury of good and lawful men to wit; John Hill, Henry Stokes, Thos. Simmons, John M. Potes, Mathew Nunn, William Higgins, John W. Telford, Calvin C. Morgan, William C. Smith, William Feeney, George Steele, Patrick Austin—who being duly elected empaneled sworn and charged, the truth to speak upon the issue joined as aforesaid, on their oaths do say, we the jury find the said defendant, not guilty in manner and form as the plaintiff hath alledged against

him— It is therefore considered by the court that said defendant, be discharged hence. United States of America— Pleas had at a District Court of the United States, begun and held for the Northern District of the State of Alabama, at the court house in the Town of Huntsville, on the first Monday in October being the first day of said month, in the fifty second year of American Independence before the Honorable William Crawford Judge D.

(Source: Federal District Court Records for Alabama, National Archives Branch, East Point, Georgia)

BOOK REVIEWS

COTTON FIELDS AND SKYSCRAPERS by David R. Goldfield
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982)

The contrasting symbolism in the title of the book is both striking and provocative. *Cotton Fields* is especially loaded with stereotypical imagery that evokes a myriad of highly charged emotions. The description in the opening paragraphs of chapters one and two ably demonstrates the connection with *Cotton Fields* by painting a vivid picture of the romanticized version of the southern ideal which is such an integral part of the tradition of Dixie. However, it is an appropriate introduction to a theme that is treated throughout the book, as noted on page 161 of the last chapter.

With skill, sophistication, and finesse, Goldfield astutely narrates the development of the southern city and its role in southern history. The emphasis on the region as a basis for understanding urbanization is an interesting approach that is long overdue. Goldfield's approach reminds me of an essay by Samuel P. Hayes entitled, "The Structure of Environmental Politics Since World War II," in the *Journal of Social History*, Summer, 1981, and a short introduction to a portion of Lewis E. Athernton's *Main Street on the Middle Border*, entitled, "The Small Town in the Gilded Age." The introduction to Athernton's work speculates that "perhaps someday an historian will write a history of the United States in terms of the rise and decline of specific regions, developing the notion that certain regions seized the leadership of the country at particular periods in history" (p. 57). Samuel P. Hayes' article discusses a type of "historical conceptualization" that allows for the study of "human affairs" at different levels of society in an interdependent context. It suggests a "three-tiered approach" that includes "the grassroots," "the region," and "the nation" (p. 719). Despite the fact that the concept of region is used in the study of the frontier or westward movement in American history, both essays imply a new application of the term. Goldfield uses the concept to study the process of urbanization in the south. Although the focus is primarily on the south as a region, he succeeds in informing the reader about local conditions (grass roots) and national developments. Simultaneously he describes the role that a region played in the national economy in relation to another.

Goldfield laid the basis for this approach in an earlier article, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," in *The American Historical Review*, December, 1981. His discussion of the conceptualization and application of the terms regional and urban is impressive and demonstrates both a thorough grasp of the literature and an ability to think independently about it. The author's familiarity with the writings of urban experts and with a broad range of literature from various fields is obvious throughout the book, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. It is reassuring to find historians well represented in this body of literature and refreshing to observe a historian making such skillful use of novelists and essayists, and at the same time draw upon scholarship from experts in other disciplines. Goldfield's work and approach reflect the methodological and research orientation found in much of the new history developed since the 1960s.

Goldfield's central argument is that the southern city is the hallmark and preserver of the south's distinctive tradition and that the difference between cities of the north and south can be traced to the southern tradition. Urbanization, therefore, will not result in the south becoming a replica of the industrialized north. The author argues that urbanization has not changed the southern tradition, but rather the region's tradition has determined the character of urbanization. This, in turn, has given rise to cities that are urban in their own right but distinctly different from those in the north. This phenomenon is explained by examining the factors that have formed core characteristics for this region and dominated southern history. Specifically, these factors are: 1) a rural life-style (dominated by a single staple crop); 2) a biracial society; and 3) a colonial economy.

Goldfield cogently develops this theme and supporting argument in four chapters that are packed with analytical insight and informative discussion, that include a description of the phases in southern urban development from colonial times to the present. The entire work was enlightening. However, I found the last three chapters especially stimulating. They focused upon urbanization during the antebellum era, the postbellum era, and the post-World War I era. Urbanization in southern society has its origins in the early period in American history. The basis for southern urban society emerged during the colonial period and developed during succeeding periods.

By the antebellum period it was apparant that the south was not moving along the same lines or at the same pace as in the north with respect to urbanization. Goldfield points out that the larger industrialized cities did not materialize in the south as they did in the north. He says that the difference was not due solely to physical environment, but largely to the dominance of a single staple crop, namely, cotton. He contends that cotton determined the rural quality of life in the south, which reinforced its dependency on a slavery base and the support of a biracial society. This led to economic dependency on the north and eventually regional colonialism (pp. 29-35, 37, 58-60).

The American economy was regional until the 1840s, when a national economy began to emerge. By the 1850s, southern leaders became aware of the dominant influence of northern industrial cities on the national economy. During this decade southerners sought to break out of the dependent mode. They felt that the southern city was the key. They had fallen behind the north because they neglected to build their cities. Urbanization would result in greater industrialization and increase commerce and trade, which in turn would bring about economic parity with the north. This would lead to the elimination of the south's dependent status. Goldfield contends that this effort was a major influence on the south's perception of the competition and conflict that ultimately led to the Civil War. In other words, he posits an urban interpretation to the sectionalism that culminated in the Civil War.

The main thesis of chapter three is that the postbellum period did not give rise to a new south. Despite the fact that the postbellum spokesmen were primarily urban entrepreneurs and city boosters who proclaimed the cities as the "offsprings" of the new era, Goldfield argues that they were really rebuilding the urban model that existed before the Civil War. The major difference was that the new leadership reconciled itself to the colonial status of the south and hoped that the business community would profit sufficiently to move their cities forward toward progress.

Goldfield concedes that the enterprise was carried out under new circumstances. The Civil War altered some aspects of southern life and new structural arrangements replaced old systems. However, the basic character of southern life and the process of urbanization re-

mained unaltered. Goldfield contends that the south became more dependent on those factors that had determined the quality of southern life and urban development before the war. Its economy became more entrenched in a single staple crop with a new labor system—peonage—designed for the new situation. As the urban port cities of the south declined in influence, the antebellum-type city became more widely distributed. The urban-type city of the south was no longer limited to the ports and coastal regions. The new labor system was suitable for agricultural needs and therefore perpetuated the rural quality of southern life. It also reinforced the biracial character of southern society. According to Goldfield, the fact that the south did not attract large numbers of European immigrant workers tended to enhance the biracial nature of the society. He further states that the north played a greater role in the southern economy after the war. Northerners extended their business enterprises into the south and many southerners became more dependent on northern capital. The distinctive urban character of southern cities became more pervasive during this period; the rural quality of southern life did not diminish; and northern influence in the national economy became more dominant.

Post-World War I covers the period from the 1920s to the present. According to Goldfield, it was during this period that the metropolitan southern city emerged. Goldfield's discussion of this development in the last chapter indicates that a gradual process gave rise to a metropolitan regionalism in the south in contrast to the metropolis of the north that evolved into megalopolis. A metropolitan south did herald change, referred to by Goldfield as "A kind of sunlight," but he contends it was not really a new south.

Following World War I, some of the underpinning of southern society began to loosen. This loosening, Goldfield points out, was not of the south's doing and often without the cooperation from the guardians of southern tradition. The Great Depression and the federal government played an important role in encouraging the south to relinquish its single staple-crop economy. Many of the programs implemented by the federal government in response to the Depression led to agricultural diversification in the south. Also the federal government introduced new technology that replaced traditional agricultural methods and practices. The federal government provided economic

incentive by offering subsidies to participants in the new experiment. These factors helped to undermine the single staple crop upon which the southern economy was largely based, as well as weaken the peonage labor system. The federal government helped to expand industrial growth in the south. Goldfield points out that the New Deal programs to the cities benefited the entire south. Much of the financial aid designed to bring economic relief to workers in the south flowed into the region's cities. These financial grants helped not only to alleviate unemployment and poverty but were used to improve the physical environment of the cities and the region. In many parts of the south the improvement of the physical environment had gone unattended, except in the business districts. World War II brought about a resumption of federal activity started in World War I. During World War II the government resumed the practice of singling out certain southern cities as centers for military industry. In fact, southern cities were sometimes favored because of their "chronic economic problems." As a result of war-time industries and the policy of the federal government, the south experienced greater industrial growth, thus lessening its dependency on the agricultural economy.

Industrialization also was a factor that influenced the migration from rural to urban areas, beginning with World War I. Population movement flowed toward the cities, especially during the two wars. Southern cities benefited from this general migration trend, but this also led to an out-migration from the south to the north. The northern cities were more industrialized than southern cities. Therefore, when the two wars came, more jobs were made available in northern cities. Thus blacks, as well as whites, were drawn to the urban areas of the north in much greater numbers. Goldfield concludes that migration had a devastating impact upon the southern labor system, weakening it and posing a threat to the biracial society.

On the heels of World War II came the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which was an additional assault on the biracial nature of southern society. The Civil Rights movement not only posed a threat to the biracial system but challenged its legitimacy. Goldfield argues that the guardians of southern tradition could take no credit for this development. Blacks initiated the challenge and the federal government belatedly and reluctantly joined them. Goldfield says it was this alliance that resulted in civil rights victories and blacks receiv-

ing a voice in the biracial society. He says some have noted that it was the "good south," the so-called white "moderates" who used liberal rhetoric, that delayed the attack, rather than actively seeking to liberate the south from its biracial society. Although all walls of segregation did not crumble, the south and southern cities were never quite the same.

With the decline of the single-crop economy, the postbellum labor system, and biracial social structure, the old south was on the verge of becoming a new south. Goldfield states that small-city urbanization which had made southern urbanization distinctive for over a century began to decline in the 1940s. By the 1950s southern cities, along with cities throughout the country, were expanding. However, the expansion was primarily a result of annexation rather than a response to population demands as in the north. In the south annexation resulted from city boosters pushing the need for city planning. This is what gave rise to the metropolitan regionalism that characterized the south by the 1960s and 1970s.

Metropolitan regionalism coincided with the emergence of the Sun Belt, a phenomenon that included but was not limited to the south. Goldfield indicated that replacing the New South creed with the Sun Belt seemed to guarantee a new future for the region and a new south. But Goldfield says not so. He says the new future would not include the elimination of the secondary role played by the south in the national economy, at least, not for a while.

The south was part of the Sun Belt but many of its states did not reap the prosperity of Sun Belt states. The scene had changed, Goldfield says, but urbanization was different in the south. Southern cities were metropolitan not because of population growth but geographical expansion. They grew horizontally rather than numerically in proportion to their northern counterparts. Although skyscrapers have replaced cotton fields as symbols, the author argues that conspicuous structures have not changed southern culture. Thus Goldfield concludes that tradition has triumphed over urbanization.

Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers makes a significant contribution to southern historiography. This is especially true in its emphasis on the role of the southern cities and the coming of the Civil War. Also

the discussion of the New South after the Civil War and into the 20th century is important for southern historiography. The book's postulation of the dependency role of the south in the national economy and its questioning the validity of the New South Creed is certainly pertinent to any discussion of southern historiography. Another important aspect of the book is its claim of a distinctive urban tradition for the south. In this respect it makes a major contribution to the question of urbanization and American urban history. In addition, the book provides the basis for expanding a new methodological approach to the study of American history by refining and refocusing the regional concept. This book should provide the basis for a great deal of critical analysis and debate in both southern and urban history.

James W. Johnson,
Alabama A&M University

JAMES HENRY HAMMOND AND THE OLD SOUTH by
Drew Gilpin Faust (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
Press, 1982) 397 pp., \$27.50

It is not very often that I highly recommend a book that almost literally makes me sick. The life of this man is downright sordid; unfortunately damning, at least to me, the antebellum society which he both represented and helped to maintain.

Drew Gilpin Faust, chairman of the Department of American Civilization of the University of Pennsylvania, has provided a first-rate biography of this man of humble origins who married into wealth (acquiring a plantation and many slaves), became one of the wealthiest men of South Carolina, and served in the United States House of Representatives and as Governor of South Carolina.

A man who had insatiable ambition, an ambition which clouded everything he did and eventually consumed him, he was determined to absolutely control his life and everything about him. This meant complete control over all about him, especially his slaves. Ms. Faust excerpts part of his will in which he tells his son not to sell certain listed slaves (Sally Johnson and her daughter and some of their offspring), for they were his mistresses and children. Further, he reminds the son that the mistresses were also used by the son.

Enough said—but for a better understanding of one major example of plantation life in the antebellum South, this book should be read and studied.

EDITOR

ALABAMA PLACE-NAMES by W. Stuart Harris (Huntsville: The Strode Publishers, 1982) 178pp., \$13.95

Know where Frog Level is? Why it was named? How about Axis, Fair Play, or Gaino? Bug Tussle and Eliska? Hell's Half Acre?

This is one book you just have to have. No ifs, ands, or buts. Wonderful for tidbits of Alabama history and lore, yet it also provides an overview of Alabama life seldom presented in one book.

Parents with children who are looking for games to play while they take an automobile trip through the state could use this book to great advantage. What better way to interest the children in the history and lore of their state and make history come alive, than by discussing the origins of the towns and villages, creeks and rivers and hills and valleys the automobile will pass through just beyond the next curve or over that hill.

EDITOR

GOD AND GENERAL LONGSTREET by Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 155pp., \$12.95

Always provocative, Thomas Connelly has done it again. Author of previous books on the Army of the Tennessee and Robert E. Lee, he has (in collaboration with a research person at his fellow institution, the University of South Carolina) traced the persistence and the transformation of the "Lost Cause" from the end of the Confederacy down to the present time. Known for his criticism of Lee, his contention that Lee was too much oriented to the Virginia area, and therefore did not have a real conception of the strategic importance of the Trans-Appalachian West, is continued here by the authors in an excellent chapter, "Robert E. Lee and the Southern Mind."

Perhaps the authors' most interesting chapter is their last, "The Enduring Memory," in which the contention is made that the South was and is viewed by the rest of the country, beginning in the 1970s, "as an alternate society with considerable appeal." This new attractiveness was evident in three cultural phenomena: the "huge growth of southern evangelical bodies in the country, the mass media and the national interest in country music." To Connelly and Bellows, Elvis Presley was "the most obvious public symbol of the "Lost Cause." When he died in 1977 there "was an outpouring of grief unmatched since the 1870 funeral of Robert E. Lee"!! Presley and Lee? As I said, most interesting.

EDITOR

THE GEOLOGICAL SCIENCES IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH, edited by James X. Corgan (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982) 170pp., \$17.50

This is an important work, for it introduces, to people interested in the history of the south, broad interdisciplinary studies of the geological sciences in the antebellum South. The nine papers presented were part of a symposium, "The History of the Geological Sciences in the Antebellum South" held in Birmingham in March, 1980, as part of a southeastern sectional meeting of the Geological Society of America. All of the contributors (only three from the South) are experienced scholars who have some status as students of history.

Fortunately for most of us, there has been an "active avoidance of detail in all the essays in this volume" (better for the general audience not to be lost in a maze of details). Also most contributions are at least partially biographical, and no contribution assumes the reader to have a background in any of the sciences or an especially strong interest in the scientific aspects of modern culture. Alabama is well represented; for example, Charles Lyell's observations on southeastern geology.

How correct he was, when he expressed the opinion that the iron, limestone, and coal of the Birmingham area would ultimately be a source of mineral wealth. However, there is really only one reference to Huntsville, when the French emigre Joseph Nicollet examined the Cumberland Mountains from Huntsville to the Cumberland River.

EDITOR

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